

SSCPC Southeast Seattle Crime Prevention Council

October 12, 2009

Stella Chao, Director DON (Department of Neighborhoods)

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Dear Ms. Chao

We'd appreciate a written update on the status of the ten recommendations contained in the City Auditor report "Seattle District Council System Needs Renewal" dated June 22, 2009. The ten recommendations are:

1. Clarify the City's objectives for the district council/City Neighborhood Council system: is the emphasis on information or policy?
2. Consider a change in the names "district council" and "City Neighborhood Council."
3. Provide additional guidelines for the district council/City Neighborhood Council system consistent with any clarified objectives.
4. Require that standards are met if district council and City Neighborhood Council responsibilities include rating and ranking City grants.
5. Avoid characterizing the district councils and City Neighborhood Council as representative bodies.
6. Clarify the City's role in district council governance.
7. Establish appropriate conditions for the City's continued support of the district councils and City Neighborhood Council.
8. The City should explore ways to help district councils and the City Neighborhood Council reduce and/or manage conflict at meetings.
9. The City should clarify the level of staff support it will provide to district councils, the City Neighborhood Council, and other groups.
10. The Department of Neighborhoods should improve its compliance with the State's document retention laws by retaining district council documents that come into its possession.

SSCPC (Southeast Seattle Crime Prevention Council) believes that neighborhood planning and the pressure from outsiders to so-called "realize the investment in light rail" mandate that all SE groups work together. SSCPC would like to rejoin the Southeast District Council (SEDC) once the clarification specified by the audit has been accomplished. We believe that the City's expectations, role and services to and with district councils should be clearly defined by modifying resolutions 27709 and 28115.

In addition to clarification recommended by the audit, SSCPC supports a clear definition of the word "representative" which is contained in both resolutions. The audit states that district councils should not be characterized as representative bodies because the members are "... not elected at large but are volunteers". SSCPC views SEDC as similar to the United States Congress where members are elected by district or state. The point is that members are chosen by a constituency to convey the voice, view and vote of that constituency and to report back to that constituency.

SEDC should be the place where "representatives" chosen by their membership organizations convey the voice, view and vote of those organizations and report back to those organizations. We view this approach as grassroots democracy and believe that grassroots democracy is vital in our community with its ethnic diversity. We believe that a non-profit agency cannot possibly act as "representative" of the people served by that agency because the agency is not a membership organization and the people being served have not chosen the agency to speak or act on their behalf. The City's misguided efforts to promote diversity by allowing service providers to anoint themselves as "representatives" for their clientele disrespects that clientele and denies them equal treatment in clear conflict with the City's Race and Justice Initiative.

We note that the City's outreach effort in updating the neighborhood plans did not rely on meetings with service providers to obtain the views of community members who might otherwise not have participated in general community meetings. The City met with ethnic communities in settings comfortable to them to get firsthand information from the people themselves. We expect the City to continue facilitating people speaking for themselves by making clear in the changes to Resolutions 27709 and 28115 that diversity means everyone choosing those who will speak and act on their behalf.

SSCPC looks forward to rejoining a truly representative SEDC made possible by the City clarifying its expectations. We would appreciate your written response on the status of the ten recommendations by November 21, 2009, so SSCPC can incorporate that information into its 2010 planning.

Thank you.

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